



General Assembly

Seventy-third session

1st plenary meeting
Tuesday, 18 September 2018, 3 p.m.
New York

Official Records

President: Ms. Espinosa Garcés. (Ecuador)

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Item 1 of the provisional agenda

Opening of the session by the President of the General Assembly

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I declare open the seventy-third regular session of the General Assembly.

Item 2 of the provisional agenda

Minute of silent prayer or meditation

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with rule 62 of the rules of procedure, I invite representatives to stand and observe one minute of silent prayer or meditation.

The members of the General Assembly observed a minute of silent prayer or meditation.

Statement by the President

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): It is an honour to address members for the first time as President of the United Nations General Assembly. I am speaking with a profound sense of responsibility and commitment to the Charter of the United Nations and its founding principles, and in the utmost respect for the peoples of the world, whose well-being is our principal goal. I am honoured to represent my beloved region of Latin America and the Caribbean, a region of peace that is committed to human rights.

The presidency of the General Assembly is also an honour for my country, Ecuador, and a reflection of its support for multilateralism and its people's sense of international solidarity and cooperation. But this year we must go beyond the national political and governmental agenda that has been my priority for the past 11 years. I want to assure the Assembly that from today, I will be working under the blue flag of our Organization for the shared interests and decisions of all of its 193 States Members.

Since I am only the fourth woman to occupy this position in the 73 years of the life of the United Nations, I want to reiterate that I am dedicating my presidency to all the women in the world — to women who are entering politics, to those who are struggling for equality in the workplace, to women and girls who are victims of violence and to young girls and adolescents who are demanding access to quality information and education. Three great women have presided over the Assembly in the past 72 years: Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, of India, in 1953; Angie E. Brooks, of Liberia, in 1969; and Sheikha Haya Rashed Al Khalifa, of the Kingdom of Bahrain, in 2006. My tribute and homage goes to them and to the legacy they have left at the Organization.

I also want to thank my predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Miroslav Lajčák, whose work during the seventy-second session was exemplary. I intend to build on his achievements and good practices, especially his morning dialogues and monthly coordination meetings with the principal organs of the Organization. We thank President Lajčák for his leadership, which has always included inclusive dialogue and a cooperative spirit. We

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wish him every success in his work as he returns to his beloved country, our sister Republic of Slovakia.

I have tried to learn as much as possible in these short weeks of transition. In that time, I have had the support of the Permanent Mission of Ecuador, the representatives of the States that have contributed to the staff of the Office of the President of the General Assembly and the support of the professional staff of the United Nations system. I want to inform members that we are ready to begin the work of the Assembly. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his support during the transition period and for his advice and commitment to the Organization. In accordance with my mandate from the States, I am ready to support the Secretary-General in all his initiatives aimed at strengthening the operations of the United Nations system and thereby to improve the efficiency and impact of the Organization's work in the field.

The General Assembly is not just the most democratic and representative organ of the United Nations, it is a forum encompassing the most diverse knowledge, cultures and professions of the world. In fact, it constitutes the world's largest and most influential centre of global thought. Our thinking, knowledge and vision set the standards for cooperation among our nations and between our Governments and peoples. Every day we work together to search for solutions to the most difficult problems facing humankind.

In the past 72 years, the Assembly has produced and codified a body of the most important aspects of international law and human rights. Despite our many achievements, however, great challenges remain. We have made significant progress in decolonization, but there is still a pending agenda. Every day we work together to build peace and prevent conflicts, but the scourge of war is still present. We have made significant progress with agreements to protect the environment and slow climate change, but nature and the planet still continue to suffer and are at serious risk, even threatening the survival of humankind. We have reached important agreements protecting indigenous peoples and nationalities, but they remain the poorest of the poor. We have made significant progress on the development agenda, starting with the Millennium Development Goals, but significant challenges remain, and they are now included in the Sustainable Development Goals. Those are just a few examples.

We must all be aware that the Organization still has many challenges and obligations. Some are beginning to be met, such as addressing the migration phenomenon through an internationally agreed-on instrument, which will undoubtedly be one of the most important milestones that we will witness this session. It is my hope that we will be able to witness the fulfilment of other major outstanding obligations of the Organization, such as resolving the situation of the brotherly Palestinian people. We must also adapt to new times. The Assembly must address the impact of new technologies on the world of work, communications and social coexistence, for example.

The contribution of the United Nations to humankind has been immense. However, its impact and relevance would be even greater if our peoples felt that what we were discussing and agreeing on here was — as is indeed the case — something that directly concerned them. We have not succeeded in getting our peoples to connect our work to their daily lives. Making the United Nations more relevant to all people will therefore be the main focus of my work during this session. If we can manage to establish that connection in the short term, it will have a double effect. First, it will bring us as an Organization closer to society, to the people, thereby highlighting our role in their lives and their most pressing needs; and secondly, our peoples would become our greatest allies in implementing the agreements we reach in the Assembly at the national level.

Please allow me to be a little didactic, therefore, and to address those who perhaps do not know what is currently going on in the Assembly. Today is the beginning of a new session of the General Assembly, the most important representative and decision-making organ of the United Nations. Over the next 12 months, the 193 States represented here will debate approximately 330 draft resolutions on an equal number of topics, all of great global interest. We have scheduled nearly 100 plenary meetings and an indefinite number of working meetings and negotiations.

This year we will also take up 34 mandates on various topics of global interest and hold 18 summits, forums and high-level meetings. Finally, during this session we will be responsible for leading and facilitating 13 intergovernmental processes on extremely important issues, such as Security Council reform, the revitalization of the General Assembly and the alignment of the General Assembly with the 2030

Agenda for Sustainable Development. That may sound very obvious to all of us, but I assure everyone that it is not obvious to the great majority of people. For that reason, I have emphasized to the communication teams of the Secretariat the importance of further highlighting the work of the Assembly. Communication should therefore be a priority during this session.

The items on the regular programme of work and the mandates entrusted to me are many and will be duly implemented, with everyone's support. However, as usual, after my dialogues with many people in the Assembly, including leaders and representatives of several States, and after analysing the most pressing global issues, I can now propose the following seven priority themes for this session.

First, gender equality and the empowerment of women must remain a priority until they are definitively achieved. I will promote the empowerment of women and girls from all fronts. Life is better for all of us when everyone is on a level playing field and human rights are accessible to all, without discrimination.

Second, we will prioritize the promotion and implementation of the new global compacts on migration and refugees. It is our duty to seek protection for millions of refugees around the world and direct our efforts towards safe, orderly and regular migration. The Intergovernmental Conference to Adopt the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, to be held in December in Morocco, will be a major milestone in that direction.

Third, we will prioritize the creation of decent work opportunities for young people, women and persons with disabilities. That will be one of the most important challenges for public policies related to the development and sustainability of social security systems.

Fourth, I will work to bring greater attention to environmental protection. The General Assembly must become a voice that calls for public awareness of pollution by plastic waste as a pervasive environmental hazard that affects the health and well-being of people and ecosystems around the world. We will also pave the way for the United Nations 2019 Climate Summit, announced by the Secretary-General.

Fifth, we will prioritize the importance of strengthening political and social commitment to persons with disabilities. There is still a need for greater awareness of that population's specific needs.

Accessibility, inclusive and quality education and decent employment are challenges faced by humankind's largest minority, persons with disabilities.

Sixth, we will prioritize the revitalization of the United Nations. We will work in three areas: implementing reforms of the United Nations system; strengthening the process of revitalizing the General Assembly to optimize its working methods and enhance its deliberative and decision-making role; and continuing the process of the reform of the Security Council, in line with the will and commitment of States.

Seventh, we will make peace and security a hugely important priority. The armed conflicts that are currently ongoing can only cause all of us the deepest pain. The security problems experienced by many of our societies also represent an enormous challenge for Governments and for the Organization. The Assembly must become the principal peacebuilding organ through a preventive approach. Sustainable peace must be rooted in dialogue and understanding, and facilitating that dialogue will be my priority. In addition, we all recognize the fundamental role that young people play in building safe societies and preventing conflicts. The General Assembly must promote efforts to ensure that young people have greater opportunities and thereby prevent the kinds of conditions that inevitably lead them to violent extremism.

Two major concepts and strategic visions will be part of my work this year — peace and human rights for all, and strengthened multilateralism with global leadership and shared responsibilities. The seven priorities I mentioned are geared around those concepts and, while ambitious, will guide my work during this session to achieve our goal of building a more relevant United Nations for all.

One of the most effective ways to measure the Organization's impact is undoubtedly in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The greatest indicator of the success of the work of the Assembly is the well-being of people, in their daily lives and prospects for the future. That impact will ultimately ensure that the United Nations continues to be relevant and valuable to the world. The agenda is enormous. My role will be to encourage dialogue and facilitate consensus-building during consultations and ongoing discussions so as to enable us to take action-oriented decisions.

We are now beginning a new session, with an intense agenda for the final week of September. We are finalizing preparations for the Nelson Mandela Peace Summit, to be held on 24 September. The event, in honour of the hundredth anniversary of Madiba's birth, will provide all States with a historic opportunity to present their views on how to prevent conflict and give renewed impetus to building peaceful societies. The nine days of the general debate will begin on 25 September. Once again, leaders will be able to listen and be heard in the only forum that exists for the purpose, the General Assembly. It is in this Hall that all nations are equal, with the same seat, the same button to vote and the same right to ask to speak, as well as to listen and be heard. I encourage delegations to be present in the General Assembly Hall when our Heads of State and Government deliver their statements. It is only by knowing and listening to each other that we will be able to advance our common aspirations for peace, security, human rights and sustainable development.

I want to assure members that, with the participation of all States, I will support and lead efforts to make a success of all the high-level meetings and conferences, on health, climate change, South-South cooperation and middle-income countries, among other mandates. It is in my interest, as well as that of members, to ensure that our deliberations lead to useful and concrete recommendations. As I said on the day of my election (see A/72/PV.92), I want to assure the Assembly that I will abide with absolute responsibility by the code of ethics for the President of the General Assembly and by the precepts of the Charter of the United Nations and the rules of procedure of the General Assembly.

During this session we will mark the seventieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Resolution 217/A (III), of 10 December 1948, was perhaps one of the most important resolutions ever adopted by the Assembly, as it marked the beginning of a new era, that of the universalization of human rights. We are sometimes not aware that every day we are making history with the resolutions adopted in this Hall. Let us continue together to make history and to build a world that is more egalitarian and free, more sustainable and respectful of nature and with greater inclusivity and solidarity.

I now give the floor to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, His Excellency Mr. António Guterres.

The Secretary-General (*spoke in Spanish*): Let me start by again congratulating Her Excellency Ms. María

Fernanda Espinosa Garcés of Ecuador on her election as President of the General Assembly at its seventy-third session.

(*spoke in English*)

Ms. Espinosa Garcés brings wide-ranging diplomatic and intergovernmental experience to the role, as well as deep knowledge of the international agenda. She already knows the United Nations quite well, having served as Permanent Representative in Geneva. Of course, in addition to being the first woman to become her country's Permanent Representative, she is now the fourth to serve as President of the General Assembly — and the first in more than a decade. I am sure that additional perspective will enrich and advance our work. Your presence, Madam President, is a guarantee that gender parity is on the move.

We have a busy session ahead of us. We need action for peacekeeping, gender parity, financing for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, empowerment for the world's young people, urgent steps to end poverty and conflict, and much else. I encourage members to tell their leaders to come to next week's high-level week ready to be bold and forge solutions to our global challenges. Looking further ahead, there are important gatherings on the calendar that can solidify progress on key global challenges.

The twenty-fourth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change will gather in Poland in December. Climate impacts continue to worsen and accelerate, and our actions and ambitions are nowhere near where they need to be to avoid catastrophe. Fortunately, technology is on our side, and much is happening towards a green economy that we can build on. Let us make sure that Katowice is a success. Also in December, Heads of State and Government will meet in Marrakech to formally adopt a landmark global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration. Implementing the compact should help us reap the widespread benefits of migration while protecting people against dangerous journeys, exploitation and discrimination. I look forward to its formal adoption.

The Assembly has a vital role to play on those and all other issues. At a time of fragmentation and polarization, the world needs the Assembly to show the value of international cooperation. The Secretariat and I are committed to supporting and strengthening the ways in which we work together. I wish you, Madam

President, and all Member States every success as we strive to achieve our shared goals.

The President: I thank the Secretary-General for his statement.

Item 141 of the provisional agenda

Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations (A/73/367/Rev.1)

The President (spoke in Spanish): In keeping with established practice, I would like to draw the attention of the General Assembly to document A/73/367/Rev.1, which contains the text of a letter from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the General Assembly, in which he informs the Assembly that four Member States are in arrears in the payment of their financial contributions to the United Nations within the terms of Article 19 of the Charter of the United Nations.

I would like to remind delegations that, under Article 19 of the Charter,

"A Member of the United Nations which is in arrears in the payment of its financial contributions to the Organization shall have no vote in the General Assembly if the amount of its arrears equals or exceeds the amount of the contributions due from it for the preceding two full years."

May I take it that the General Assembly takes note of the information contained in document A/73/367/Rev.1?

It was so decided.

Item 3 of the provisional agenda

Credentials of representatives to the seventy-third session of the General Assembly

(a) Appointment of the members of the Credentials Committee

The President (spoke in Spanish): Rule 28 of the rules of procedure provides that the General Assembly at the beginning of each session shall appoint, on the proposal of the President, a Credentials Committee consisting of nine members.

Accordingly, it is proposed that, for the seventy-third session, the Credentials Committee should consist of the following Member States: Antigua and Barbuda, Chile, China, Finland, Ghana, Palau, the

Russian Federation, Sierra Leone and the United States of America.

May I take it that the States that I have just mentioned are hereby appointed members of the Credentials Committee?

It was so decided.

The President (spoke in Spanish): Delegations are reminded that credentials should be submitted to the Office of Legal Affairs, as announced in the *Journal of the United Nations*.

Item 7 of the provisional agenda

Organization of work of the seventy-third session of the General Assembly

Letter from the Chair of the Committee on Conferences (A/73/369)

The President (spoke in Spanish): The Assembly will now turn its attention to document A/73/369, which contains the text of a letter dated 4 September 2018 from the Chair of the Committee on Conferences addressed to the President of the General Assembly. Members are aware that, pursuant to section 1, paragraph 7, of Assembly resolution 40/243, of 18 December 1985, no subsidiary organ of the General Assembly should be permitted to meet at United Nations Headquarters during the main part of a regular session of the Assembly, unless explicitly authorized by the Assembly.

On the strict understanding that meetings would have to be accommodated within available facilities and services, authorization is thus sought for the following subsidiary organs: the Committee on Relations with the Host Country; the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People; the Executive Board of the United Nations Development Programme/the United Nations Population Fund/the United Nations Office for Project Services; the United Nations Board of Auditors; the Panel of External Auditors of the United Nations, the Specialized Agencies and the International Atomic Energy Agency; and the Independent Audit Advisory Committee.

May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to authorize those subsidiary organs of the Assembly to meet during the main part of the seventy-third session of the General Assembly?

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 3.45 p.m.